

AUGUST 9, 2005

SCHAKOWSKY GIVES KEYNOTE SPEECH SUPPORTING INCREASED AFFORDABLE HOUSING IN CHICAGO

CHICAGO, IL - U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky today delivered the keynote speech to members of the Balanced Development Coalition and concerned Chicago residents about the need to provide new affordable housing options throughout Chicago. Representative Schakowsky joined leaders of allied organizations including ACORN, One, Metro Seniors, and the Jane Adams Senior Caucus to build momentum for initiatives to create new affordable housing options now pending in the Chicago City Council.

In Illinois, there are 49 towns where less than 10 percent of the housing stock is considered affordable. Representative Schakowsky has consistently worked in Congress to make housing accessible and affordable to all residents and has fought against predatory lending to ensure that poor homeowners are not punished by unfair financing.

Representative Schakowsky's remarks are below, as prepared for delivery:

"Ensuring that everyone has safe and affordable housing is one of my highest priorities and always will be. I consider myself to be your partner in the fight for affordable housing. Although many couch talk of lack of affordable housing in terms of a crisis or an emergency, it isn't. Lack of affordable housing is not like a natural disaster. It is not like the tsunami of last year or a hurricane. It is not a catastrophic event to which we bring in the emergency crews to clean up the mess and then we go back to regular order."

"Lack of affordable housing is regular order. It is a chronic, institutional problem that has grown up and become part of the very infrastructure of our country because of choices by and decisions of policy-makers, developers, and the general public. As such, if we are going to seriously address the lack of affordable housing, we need institutional answers. We need to make decisions and choices that will change the very nature of the housing stock that is available, that will ensure that everyone who needs a home can get one. We need solutions that look at other issues that contribute to families not being able to find safe and affordable housing - like an irresponsibly low minimum wage - so that families can afford the housing that is available."

"I appreciate your efforts to address the lack of affordable housing through a set-aside for affordable units in new developments. I think that your approach gets to the heart of the matter - that we need to make systematic changes that will demonstrate a real commitment to increasing the amount of affordable housing available."

"There are a number of programs that the federal government has in place that also could be used to effect structural changes in our country to make the lack of affordable housing a thing of the past. However, despite the U.S. being the wealthiest country in the history of the world, the Republicans are refusing to fund those programs at levels that could make a difference. All of us here tonight know that there is absolutely no reason for anyone, in such a wealthy country, to be unable to afford a place to live.

"Budgeting is fundamentally about choices and priorities. And, the Republican Majority has chosen to provide an average tax cut of \$140,000 this year to people making more than \$1 million rather than pay for programs that could provide millions of families with safe and affordable housing."

"Since they have had control of the House, Senate, and White House, the Republicans have worked systematically to dismantle - rather than reinforce - the framework of housing, income, and other supports that have helped in the fight to get and keep people in homes - through funding cuts, legislative changes, and agency rules."

"Because we have just a short time together today, and because Congress is in the middle of the 2006 appropriations process - where the checks are cut for vital government programs - I just want to touch on a couple funding choices the House Republicans have made about programs that can and do make real differences."

"As many of you know, Section 8 helps over 2 million families find safe and affordable housing every year. Although the House Republicans did accept a Democratic amendment to increase funding by \$100 million over the level they proposed, Section 8 funding is still \$214 million below the President's request. And, the President's request was not enough to provide vouchers for all of those who have them today. His level would have meant that up to 80,000 vouchers could be lost next year. While the analysis has not been done yet to tell us how many more vouchers are in jeopardy with the House Republican numbers, we know it could mean thousand more vouchers could be lost."

"The Community Services Block Grant, a program aimed at helping the poorest people in our communities who often have no other place to turn, is cut in half. More than 1,000 local community services agencies will be seriously short of resources to assist low-income people with job training, or emergency food aid, or programs for low-income seniors and home weatherization."

"The Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program is cut by \$176 million - even though there's every reason to expect that we will have another winter of unprecedented

sky-high heating oil and natural gas prices. Over the past four years, the average cost of heating a home with oil has almost doubled, and the share of that cost covered by the average LIHEAP grant has fallen by half, from 49 percent to 25 percent."

"The Republicans also cut job training and help for the unemployed by \$346 million below the current level while 7.6 million Americans remain out of work. Finally, the Community Development Block Grants (CDBG), which I know concerns many of you, would receive \$250 million less than last year if the House Republicans get their way. If this number makes it through the House and Senate conference, that could mean Chicago could lose 6 to 7 % of its CDBG funding."

"If things continue the way they have been going under this Administration and the Republican leadership, the housing crisis will be even worse than it is today and we will have a bigger challenge in front of us."

"We will see more low-income working families devoting larger percentages of their incomes to housing costs. As you may know, in May, the Center for Housing Policy released a report which found that over the past six years, the number of low and middle income working families paying more than half of their income for housing has increased by 76 percent. We will see housing programs that have traditionally provided safety nets underfunded and eliminated."

"Those of us who care about affordable housing have been treading water over the past few years. And each year, we sink a little bit deeper. If it keeps up, if the Republicans keep cutting

vital housing and income assistance at the rates they have been, we are going to drown."

"Each year, the Republicans have made us battle just to try to keep funding levels steady. They keep trying to push us under water. Wouldn't it be nice to have an Administration and a Congress that had a commitment to affordable housing? One that had a vision of how to eradicate the housing epidemic once and for all?"

"We need your help. We need you to be loud. We need you to be persistent. We need you to vote. We need you to continue doing what you are doing to keep affordable housing at the forefront of everyone's mind."

"You can make a difference and help us change course. You are the ones who are making what little housing assistance there is now work. You are the ones who are making it hard for the Republicans to cut programs. Take it to the next step and make affordable housing their number one priority, too."